

REACHING HOME

CANADA'S HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Everyone Counts

A Guide to Point-in-Time Enumerations
in Canada

1st Edition



Canada 

Aussi disponible en français sous le titre : **Tout le monde compte : Un guide sur les énumérations ponctuels au Canada**

Information contained in this publication or product may be reproduced, in part or in whole, and by any means, for personal or public non-commercial purposes without charge or further permission, unless otherwise specified. Commercial reproduction and distribution are prohibited except with written permission from Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada.

For more information, contact:

Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada

180 Kent Street, Suite 1100

Ottawa, Ontario K1P 0B6

info@infcc.gc.ca

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, 2025.

Cat. No. T94-88/2025E-PDF

ISBN 978-0-660-76241-8

Table of Contents

About this Guide.....	4
Acknowledgements	4
1: Overview of Canada's PiT Enumeration Approach	5
What is a PiT Enumeration?	5
Why coordinate PiT Enumerations in Canada?	5
How does the PiT Count complement other data sources on homelessness?	5
Standards for Participation in the Coordinated PiT Enumeration	6
Core Standards	6
Recommended Standards	8
PiT Enumeration Implementation Timeline	9
2: Developing your Local Approach	10
Defining the Scope of the PiT Enumeration	10
Consistency in coverage over time	13
Involving Community Partners	14
Staff and Volunteer Communication and Management	15
Forming Enumeration Teams and Training	15
3: The Enumeration.....	17
The Script and Informed Consent	17
Implementing the Enumeration in Shelters and Transitional Housing	19
4: The Implementation Timeline	20
Developing a PiT Enumeration Plan and Timeline	20
Planning (3+ Months before the PiT Enumeration)	20
Preparation (1 – 3 Months before the PiT Enumeration)	20
Implementation (Less than 1 Month before the PiT Enumeration)	21
Day of the PiT Enumeration	21
Post-Count	22
5: After the PiT Enumeration.....	23
Data Analysis and Interpretation	23
The PiT Core Enumeration	23
Submitting Results to Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada	23
Communicating the Results	24
Planning for the Next PiT Count	25
For more information	25

About this Guide

This guide was developed by Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada. It is intended to provide guidance to communities participating in the nationally coordinated Point-in-Time (PiT) enumeration, and other communities that wish to conduct comparable counts. It includes the standards for participation, the core screening questions that are used across participating communities, and guidelines for implementing a PiT Count enumeration.

Designated Communities under Reaching Home will conduct annual enumerations, with the PiT survey administered every three years. The next survey administration will take place in 2027. An annual enumeration provides greater continuity, year-over-year, in the understanding of the number of people experiencing homelessness across the country. It allows for a more frequent measurement of the impact of policy, program, and economic changes at the local, provincial, and national levels. It can be used to improve the understanding of local changes in homelessness and to assess program resource needs. Overall, the enumeration is one source of data used to gauge progress in ending homelessness, complemented by other data sources.

This is the first edition of the *Guide to PiT Enumerations in Canada*. However, this resource and exercise is based on numerous previous full PiT counts, where a survey was administered in addition to the enumeration. The Core Standards, Core Locations, Core Screening Questions, and guidelines included in this resource have been informed by feedback from communities and others. The guidelines in this document were developed through a review of PiT Count practices used both across Canada and internationally, and with input from communities and the PiT Count Working Group. It builds on the existing work on PiT counts by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) as well as the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the United States.

The Guide is divided into five sections:

- [1: Overview of Canada's PiT Enumeration Approach;](#)
- [2: Developing Your Local Approach;](#)
- [3: The Enumeration;](#)
- [4: The Implementation Timeline;](#) and
- [5: After the PiT enumeration.](#)

Acknowledgements

The Government of Canada gratefully acknowledges the contribution of communities and experts in Canada and internationally that provided guidance on the development of the Canadian PiT Count approach. In addition, this nationally-coordinated effort to understand homelessness would not be possible without the communities who carry out the PiT Counts and the people experiencing homelessness who participate. Their participation provides critical information that contributes to evidence-based policy and program development.

1: Overview of Canada's PiT Enumeration Approach

This guide explains Canada's Point-in-Time (PiT) enumeration approach, including information on the methodology and participation guidelines for communities. Participating communities should review this guide and resources available on the Government of Canada's [Reaching Home](#) web page. For a list of other resources, please see the [Point-in-Time Counts - Homelessness Learning Hub](#).

What is a PiT Enumeration?

A PiT enumeration is an estimate of the number of people experiencing homelessness within a determined geographical area on a single night. It also identifies the location where they spent the night: in shelter or transitional housing or in an unsheltered location. Some communities are also able to enumerate homelessness in other locations, such as institutional settings (e.g., health or correctional systems). Conducted over subsequent years, PiT enumerations can be used by the community to track progress in reducing homelessness and identify changes in the location that individuals experiencing homelessness spend the night.

The two main components of an enumeration are:

1. The sheltered enumeration, which is obtained from administrative data systems and/or shelter administrators; and
2. The unsheltered enumeration, which is collected by outreach workers, homeless-sector staff, and/or volunteers.

The aim of an enumeration is to gather as complete of a one-night community-wide picture of both sheltered and unsheltered homelessness as possible. This can be understood to be the minimum number of people experiencing homelessness in a community.

Why coordinate PiT Enumerations in Canada?

The annual enumeration, which is a key element of the nationally-coordinated PiT Counts, presents an opportunity to create a national picture of homelessness thanks to harmonized methodologies across all participating communities. Conducting PiT Counts over multiple years enables us to better understand how homelessness changes over time. The best estimate of homelessness in Canada before the nationally coordinated PiT Counts, was [The National Shelter Study](#), which is based on emergency shelter use statistics from communities in most provinces and territories. This study provides a longitudinal picture, covering nearly two-decades, of shelter use trends over time. However, this estimate does not include individuals experiencing homelessness who do not access services in shelters.

As more communities participate in the PiT Count, a broader national picture can be created. This provides a benchmark against which progress in reducing homelessness can be measured.

How does the PiT Count complement other data sources on homelessness?

As with all data sources, information collected during the nationally coordinated PiT Counts has unique strengths, as well as limitations. The nationally-coordinated PiT Count is the most geographically comprehensive source of data that informs the national picture. The methodology used to collect the data is centrally developed and shared with communities through a robust library of resources and trainings. PiT Counts include facilities and populations that may be excluded from other homelessness

data sources, such as domestic violence shelters, informal shelters, and/or individuals who never use the shelter system.

However, it is important to note that a PiT Count enumeration is **not** intended to:

- be a measure of everyone who experiences homelessness in a community over time. By focusing on a single day, the count will not include some people who cycle in and out of homelessness. What it will do is provide an estimate of how many people are homeless on a given night.
- be an enumeration of hidden homelessness (in other words, people who are “couch surfing”). The PiT Count enumeration is instead an approach to measure visible homelessness (e.g., sleeping in shelters, on the street, or in other locations that are financially supported through the homeless-serving sector) on the day of the count.
- identify how long people will experience homelessness for, nor how individuals found housing or otherwise exited homelessness, and what programs or policies supported those exits.

The PiT enumeration offers an opportunity for communities to build or update their community [Systems Map](#), which is a requirement for Reaching Home Designated Communities by March 2026. If a Systems Map has not yet been developed, a community may use the exercise of the PiT enumeration to begin to build one. Once the community has a Systems Map in place, the PiT count exercise provides an opportunity to update it each fall. The map will provide a framework for determining coverage areas for sheltered homelessness and transitional housing, and identifying outreach providers that need to be engaged in the unsheltered homelessness enumeration. For more information on Systems Mapping and the PiT enumeration, see [Defining the Scope of the PiT Enumeration](#).

Standards for Participation in the Coordinated PiT Enumeration

The nationally-coordinated PiT enumeration approach lays out Core Standards for methodology that guide how the enumeration is conducted in participating communities, to ensure consistent data collection processes across communities and over time. This consistency allows comparisons of data from different PiT enumerations and from different regions. These core standards were developed with recognition for the need to balance methodological rigour and community flexibility, to both retain data comparability and allow flexibility for the approach to be tailored to each community’s local context. The approach also includes [Recommended Standards](#), which are not mandatory, but are encouraged, based on effective practices used by communities in Canada.

Core Standards

Core Standard 1: The PiT enumeration refers to a single night between October 1 and November 30, and is conducted over a maximum of 24 hours.

Core Standard 2: The PiT enumeration is led by the Reaching Home Community Entity (CE), the Indigenous Homelessness CE, a collaboration between the two, or by a contracted third party.

Core Standard 3: The PiT enumeration coordinator works closely with the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) Lead or the lead for the community Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data, as well as any other local shelter data coordinator, where applicable.

This facilitates the efficient transfer of accurate enumeration data for reporting.

Core Standard 4: Encampments and other unsheltered areas are Core Locations and are included in the enumeration. The unsheltered enumeration is the community's best assessment of how many people experienced homelessness in these settings on a single night, which are reported separately:

Encampments: a group of visible structures (e.g., tents or shacks) where two or more individuals are staying. This enumeration may be completed earlier in the evening of the enumeration or the following morning.

Other unsheltered overnight locations: public locations (e.g., streets, alleys, parks or other green spaces), transit stations, abandoned buildings, vehicles; and other outdoor locations where people experiencing homelessness are known to sleep.

The unsheltered data collection process can cover the entire community, known locations within a community, a statistical sampling approach (typically in large communities), or a mix of these approaches.

Core Standard 5: The unsheltered enumeration is determined via screening questions administered on the night of the PiT Count or the following morning, and can be supplemented with observed homelessness (i.e., a count of individuals who are observed to be spending the night outdoors, who are known to the surveyor as currently experiencing homelessness, or who are exhibiting clear indications of not having a home).

Observed homelessness should be limited to instances where survey teams are unable to engage with someone (e.g., they are sleeping or unable to respond to the screening questions), and can be considered in encampments where it is not possible to engage with everyone. Narrow criteria should be used to avoid including individuals who are not experiencing homelessness and to minimize double counting.

Core Standard 6: Shelters for people experiencing homelessness are a Core Location and are included in the enumeration. This component of the enumeration includes the number of people who spend the night of the enumeration in:

- emergency shelters, including extreme weather shelters;
- Domestic Violence (DV) shelters; and
- hotel or motel rooms, which are supplied in lieu of shelter beds.

The enumeration for each shelter type should be reported as a separate component of sheltered counts. Shelter counts are based on data collected by shelter data systems, where available (for example, HIFIS or other HMIS), and reports of shelter occupancy for services that are not covered by HIFIS/HMIS data. The aim is to include *everyone* who is experiencing sheltered homelessness in the community on the night of the count.

Core Standard 7: Transitional housing is a Core Location and is included in the enumeration.

For the PiT enumeration, transitional housing is defined as programs that are meant to be a step between homelessness and permanent housing. Transitional housing with stays guaranteed for longer than a year or where residents have security of tenure and pay a portion of the rent should not normally be included. This category can include people in transitional beds located within other services. These

should be included only if the residents would otherwise be homeless.

Core Standard 8: The PiT enumeration coordinator is responsible for the quality of data collected.

Diligence must be exercised to ensure that each person is counted only once. This could be through maintaining a narrow time frame for the unsheltered count, carefully planning what teams cover which unsheltered areas, and administering screening questions whenever possible.

The coordinator is also responsible for ensuring that canvassers receive the proper training, including instruction on:

- PiT enumeration standards;
- screening procedures; and
- personal safety.

Core Standard 9: In Designated Communities, the PiT enumeration coordinator is required to submit an interim report (using a template provided) to the Government of Canada describing the local methodology by August 31 of the year of the PiT Count.

Core Standard 10: The results of the PiT enumeration are reported to the Government of Canada within two months of completing the enumeration. Additional optional data (e.g., from health or correctional systems) may be submitted within 3 months.

Core Standard 11: The results of the PiT enumeration are reviewed with PiT Count partners to support the interpretation and communication of the results.

At a community level, results are summarized and shared in a public report. Include local contextual data and information to help explain changes in the enumeration between years. Efforts should be made to communicate these findings to those who work in the sector and those experiencing homelessness.

Results will be summarized by HICC and shared in a public report.

Recommended Standards

Recommended Standard 1: Stakeholders whose work is relevant to homelessness are consulted to develop the local community PiT enumeration approach (e.g., define unsheltered areas to cover, determine who will carry out the unsheltered enumeration, decide whether to include observed homelessness, etc.). Stakeholders may include CABs; Indigenous organizations and communities; local homelessness outreach teams; municipalities; shelters and other homeless-sector service providers; people with lived experience of homelessness; local police and emergency services; and transit authorities.

The local methodology is approved by the CE and Indigenous Homelessness CE, where applicable.

Recommended Standard 2: Where possible, data from local public systems is included in your enumeration, especially if you have included this data in past PiT counts. This can include individuals with no fixed address in correctional facilities, juvenile detention centres, hospitals, and detox centres. This should only include those whose release is imminent, who do not have a discharge plan that includes housing. This number is not included in the core enumeration.

Recommended Standard 3: Where the municipality or province/territory has a requirement to enumerate homelessness, the CE works with them to ensure that the enumeration meets local requirements. Additionally, the CE should ensure that the municipality and/or province/territory has access to all necessary data for their reporting requirement, where applicable. Even where data sharing is not necessary for reporting, sharing the results with partners and funders can help to raise awareness of the current state of homelessness in the community.

Recommended Standard 4: Communities compare results to other homelessness data sources such as data from the Homelessness Indicator Project (HIP) to validate each source and identify gaps. Several differences in methodology could explain discrepancies between datasets, such as differing time frames, inclusion criteria, and consent processes.

PiT Enumeration Implementation Timeline

Regardless of a community's size, geography, and the PiT enumeration methods chosen, there are common steps to be taken, which are outlined below.

- 1. Planning (3+ months before the PiT Enumeration).** This time is used to identify a coordinator and engage stakeholders whose work is relevant to homelessness. The coordinator works with these stakeholders to begin identifying a search strategy for the unsheltered count and start building or updating the community Systems Map to determine the coverage needed for sheltered and transitional counts.
- 2. Preparation (1 – 3 months before the PiT Enumeration).** The coordinator ensures that all facilities that provide overnight accommodations are included in the community Systems Map. Plans for unsheltered enumeration should be discussed with the outreach providers in the community that are in the community Systems Map. A plan is developed for the day of the count (e.g., headquarters are identified, a list of needed resources is prepared). If applicable, volunteer recruitment begins.
- 3. Implementation (less than 1 month before the PiT Enumeration).** This is the time for last-minute preparation for the enumeration. The unsheltered areas to be enumerated, including encampments, should be finalized in this phase. Needed supplies are obtained, and any staff or volunteers are trained and assigned to teams.

— Day of the PiT Enumeration —
- 4. Post-Count (1+ days after the PiT Enumeration).** The coordinator ensures that data from all sheltered and unsheltered locations has been received and begins to compile it. The data is submitted to HICC via the form provided within two months of the enumeration. Additional optional data (e.g., from health or correctional systems) may be submitted within 3 months.

Further information on planning can be found in [Section 4: The Implementation Timeline](#).

2: Developing your Local Approach

The Core PiT enumeration methodology as outlined in the Enumeration [Standards for Participation](#) is intended to standardize the basic elements of the enumeration across communities. At the same time, it provides flexibility to adapt the approach to local needs. This work of local adaptation will be led by the PiT enumeration coordinator with support from the local stakeholders. This section describes key elements that are necessary for the implementation of your enumeration.

Defining the Scope of the PiT Enumeration

The PiT enumeration and the community Systems Map

Systems Mapping is a process used by communities to develop a comprehensive understanding of a local network of community services, such as a homeless-serving system, as well as connections between these service providers and broader, inter-related service systems. A Systems Map includes all of the organizations and/or service providers within a community that directly interact with clients or participants experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. For more information, see the [Reaching Home Systems Mapping Toolkit](#).

A community System Map provides the framework for determining coverage for a PiT enumeration. The Systems Map should include all service providers that can accommodate people experiencing homelessness overnight, which comprises the sheltered enumeration. It should also include all transitional housing providers, a sub-count of sheltered homelessness. The PiT enumeration exercise can be leveraged to kickstart the creation of the Systems Map, if the community has not yet begun the process of building it. Alternatively, the enumeration exercise can be an opportunity to update the existing map with any service providers that have not yet been added (e.g., new shelters or outreach providers). The PiT count presents an opportunity to engage with service providers and ensure that information is up to date in the Systems Map (e.g., eligibility for service). A comprehensive Systems Map will include all service providers that directly interact with people experiencing homelessness, including Domestic Violence shelters. This provides a picture of the resources in the local homeless-serving system, and inter-connections between systems.

Hotels/motel spaces that are being used as overflow shelter space could be captured in a few ways. They may be identified in the Systems Map as a separate overflow program, identifying the total number of spaces that could be made available, as applicable. Or shelter overflow spaces may be identified as an extension of another service provider, such as an emergency shelter, where that service provider coordinates access to the overflow spaces as an extension of its regular shelter program. Planning for sheltered enumeration will need to take permanent and overflow spaces into consideration, so that the count includes people accessing both types of shelter beds.

Shelters and Transitional Housing

Sheltered homelessness includes people sleeping in emergency shelters (general and population specific to men, women, youth, etc.), extreme weather shelters, and Domestic Violence (DV) shelters. It may also include people who receive a hotel/motel voucher in lieu of accessing a specific emergency shelter facility. The enumeration excludes people who have security of tenure or who are in social, supported, or subsidized housing.

The sheltered enumeration is divided into three sub-components:

- **Emergency shelters:** These are temporary, short-term accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. At a minimum, emergency shelters provide overnight accommodation. *All* shelters within your community must be included, regardless of their funding sources, existing data sharing agreements (or lack thereof), or other considerations. This includes general shelters, as well as those for specific populations, such as women, men, youth, and Indigenous peoples. For the PiT count, this category also includes **extreme weather shelters** (e.g., warming or cooling centres), drop-ins, and informal shelters (e.g., those operated by charities or religious organizations) that accommodate people overnight.
- **Domestic Violence (DV) shelters:** These provide temporary accommodation with support for individuals and families fleeing domestic abuse or the threat of violence. This should be reported as a separate part of the sheltered enumeration.
- **Hotel or motel spaces provided in lieu of shelter:** Overnight accommodations in a hotel or motel provided to people experiencing homelessness in lieu of shelter beds (e.g., through a voucher or arrangement with the operator). Stays are paid for by the service provider (e.g., through a voucher or arrangement with the operator), not privately (e.g., through income or savings). People who are staying in a hotel or motel because they have nowhere else to go, but are paying for their stay themselves could be experiencing hidden homelessness, and are not included in the enumeration.

The transitional housing component of the PiT count enumeration includes the following:

- **Transitional housing programs:** This includes programs that are intended to offer a supportive living environment for their residents, including offering them the experience, tools, knowledge, and opportunities for social and skill development to become more independent and transition from homelessness to secure housing. It is considered an intermediate step between emergency shelter and supportive or independent housing, and has limits on lengths of stay. This category can include people in transitional beds that are located within other service providers. Transitional housing with stays guaranteed for longer than a year, where residents have security of tenure and pay a portion of the rent, should not normally be included. These should be included only if the residents would otherwise be homeless. This is reported as a separate part of the sheltered enumeration.

In many communities, there are existing databases, such as HIFIS or another type of local HMIS, which contains the enumeration data for shelters, hotels/motels, and transitional housing programs. Where it is not possible to get this information from an existing database, sample [forms](#) are available to collect occupancy information from a shelter. The information should include the number of people who spent the night in each shelter.

Unsheltered areas

The unsheltered PiT enumeration is conducted on the night of the PiT Count, and the following morning, as required. This portion of the enumeration includes people who are sleeping in places unfit for human habitation. This includes:

- *Encampments*: a group of visible structures (e.g. tents or shacks) where two or more individuals are staying. This enumeration may be completed earlier in the evening of the enumeration or the following morning.
- *Other unsheltered overnight locations*: public locations (e.g., streets, alleys, parks or other green spaces), transit stations, abandoned buildings, vehicles; and other outdoor locations where people experiencing homelessness are known to sleep.

Encampments are reported separately due to their recent rise in visibility across the country, as well as the unique experiences of homelessness of those staying there.

It is important that the scope be as broad as possible in order to not exclude anyone experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

In geographically small or densely populated areas, it may be possible to take a **Full Coverage** approach, where the entire community is canvassed for individuals experiencing homelessness. This is the ideal, but is also resource-intensive as it may require a large number of staff or volunteers to cover the entire area. For most communities, an alternative approach is needed.

The most common approach is a **Known-Locations** search, where teams canvass areas known to be frequented by people experiencing homelessness. This approach is particularly useful for rural areas and less densely populated urban and suburban areas. The locations can be identified by service providers and emergency responders. Since rural areas can be large and sparsely populated, some communities also conduct a pre-PiT search to identify existing encampment locations.

In very geographically large communities, a **Sampling** approach may be considered, whereby a random sample of areas is searched. These areas can be census tracts. The enumeration from the sampled areas would be extrapolated to the areas not sampled. Use of this approach requires expertise in statistical sampling.

In communities with a mix of urban, suburban and rural areas, a mix of approaches is appropriate. For example, Toronto does a full-coverage survey of the downtown core and surveys a statistical sample of suburban areas. Community geography, size, and resources will affect whether Full Coverage, Known-Locations, Sampling, or a combination of all three approaches is most appropriate.

Observed Homelessness

Not everyone encountered will agree to answer the screening questions. Others may be unable to respond (e.g., if they are sleeping or if there are language barriers). Some of these individuals may be experiencing homelessness. To enumerate those that are apparently homeless but who are not participating in the screening questions, your community can consider including observed homelessness.

The criteria for including someone as observed homeless should be clearly identified. For example, individuals may be considered homeless if they are bedded down in an unsheltered location and have many belongings with them (e.g., backpacks, garbage bags, shopping carts, sleeping bags, bedrolls, etc.), or if they are known to the staff conducting the enumeration.

Observations should only be used as a last resort, since the data they provide are less reliable than those based on self-report. If observations are used, you should clearly indicate the proportion of your PiT Count enumeration that is based on observations in your reporting.

Building on the Core Locations: Public Systems

Communities may also choose to include people who are spending the night of the count in “public systems”. These may include facilities such as urgent care facilities; emergency departments; hospital in-patient wards; detox, treatment or rehabilitation centres; correctional facilities; or police holding cells. Only individuals who have no fixed address, are imminently going to be released (normally within two weeks of the enumeration), and have no discharge plan that includes housing should be included. Public systems are not a Core Location for enumeration since it would require every participating community to secure access to data from each institution. These institutions are governed by various jurisdictions at municipal, provincial, and federal levels.

Screening in people within systems can be difficult. Without being able to conduct the screening questions, it can be difficult to determine whether an individual should be included in the enumeration. Some communities have been able to administer the screening questions to people in correctional institutions, although this is rare. Data systems are used by other communities to identify people with no fixed address (or who give a shelter as their address). This solution risks including people who are in systems for long periods of time who have no permanent address, but who may have the means to acquire one on exit. Determining whether a patient or inmate will be imminently experiencing homelessness in a particular community can also be challenging since people often access health services outside of their home community, while others are held in or sentenced to a correctional facility in a different location.

Consistency in coverage over time

Using consistent criteria and procedures for determining coverage areas for the unsheltered enumeration ensures comparability of results over time. When considering what facilities, programs, unsheltered areas, and optional categories to include in the enumeration, review what was included in the prior year’s PiT count (whether a full count or enumeration-only). A community can use their [Systems Map](#) as a guide for keeping track of coverage for sheltered enumeration. If the community Systems Map has not yet been created, the PiT enumeration can kick-start the process. Facilities and programs should only be added or removed from the PiT count coverage when there are clear and compelling reasons to do so. Any changes in coverage should be explained in your local report.

Populations Outside of the Scope of the PiT Enumeration

People who are experiencing hidden homelessness. People that are staying with others or in a self-funded hotel or motel because they are unable to secure a place of their own are often referred to as experiencing “hidden homelessness.” A PiT enumeration is unable to enumerate people in this situation because people experiencing hidden homelessness are unlikely to be in the count locations and in most cases it is not possible to search overnight locations where people experiencing hidden homelessness are staying overnight (e.g., private residences).

If your community is interested in estimating the number of people experiencing hidden homelessness, an alternative approach is recommended (e.g., period-prevalence study, phone surveys, etc.).

People who are staying in housing that they rent or own, including those who can safely return to permanent housing. For example, a visitor to the city staying with a friend may have access to permanent housing in another city. Likewise, a youth staying with someone else for a night may still have permanent housing with their parents or guardians.

People who are in permanent supportive housing or Housing First programs. The PiT enumeration, in part, is meant to measure success in reducing homelessness through these Housing First and supportive housing programs, so including them among the numbers would mask this progress.

People that are experiencing overcrowding. This is an important contextual piece of information and highlights a need for housing within a community. However, because it is not possible to measure this in the context of a PiT Count, it is considered outside of the scope of the count.

Involving Community Partners

Partners are critical to the success and accuracy of a PiT Count enumeration. The PiT coordinator needs information and support from others to produce the most complete and accurate enumeration. There are three central tasks that require collaboration:

1. Identification of unsheltered coverage areas
2. Canvassing of unsheltered areas for the enumeration night/morning
3. Gathering of sheltered data, with special attention to facilities that don't use HIFIS or the common HMIS

Identification of unsheltered coverage areas

Unsheltered coverage areas need to be determined in advance of the night or morning of the PiT enumeration. Input from outreach teams is critical in identifying areas where teams may expect to encounter people experiencing homelessness. People with lived experience of homelessness and other organizations that often work with people experiencing homelessness, such as health outreach teams, other grassroots outreach teams, bylaw services, police services, and others can also be consulted. Additionally, local libraries, municipal parks, and the transit authority may contribute to the identification of coverage areas, such as bus shelters or transit stations, which may serve as overnight locations for people experiencing homelessness. Local municipalities may have maps available and can also help define the search areas. More information on deciding on the approach to take for the unsheltered portion of the enumeration can be found in **Unsheltered Areas**, in the section above.

Canvassing of unsheltered areas

Outreach teams, other sector staff and/or volunteers need to be recruited to canvass the unsheltered areas on the night or morning of the count. You may also want to invite other partners who helped identify coverage areas to participate. In addition, you may want to work with campus security, transit authorities, and others to cover difficult-to-reach areas during the unsheltered count.

You will need to provide training and materials to those carrying out the unsheltered portion of the enumeration. This training can be a virtual session(s) (either live or asynchronous), or in-person. It's important to provide opportunities for enumerators to ask questions prior to the count to clarify their role.

Gathering of sheltered data

Reach out to service providers to update or add the necessary information to the community Systems Map. After you have updated your Systems Map and ensured that all service providers that will offer overnight accommodation on the night of your enumeration are included, it is time to prepare to gather the count data. If your community has a shelter data coordinator, such as a HIFIS Lead, this person or organization should be involved in the planning process to facilitate access to shelter data. If you have central access to shelter stay data, you can notify shelters of the date of the enumeration so that they are aware of the project and know that you will be pulling shelter stay data for the night of the enumeration. Work with shelter providers whose overnight stay data you don't already have access to obtain these data and ensure completeness of sheltered portion of the count. If you don't have central access to shelter stay data, you will need to work with all shelter providers in your community to manually collect overnight stay data in the days following the night of enumeration.

In addition to the roles above, local businesses or business associations (e.g., business improvement associations) may be interested in supporting the enumeration through funding, supplies for volunteers (e.g., clip boards, paper, food) or for respondents (e.g., socks, blankets, snacks, restaurant or grocery store gift cards), and in providing volunteers.

Staff and Volunteer Communication and Management

It is important to maintain communication with the staff and volunteers in the lead up to the enumeration. Communication can include training materials and reminders of what to bring to the night (or morning) of the count. Reminding staff and volunteers to inform you if they are unable to participate will reduce the number of last-minute adjustments you will need to make to your enumeration teams.

Forming Enumeration Teams and Training

Teams are assigned to carry out the enumeration in specific unsheltered locations. People from local community partners or the general public may be solicited to volunteer on enumeration teams. Each team should consist of two to three people, ideally including at least one person who has a history of working with people experiencing homelessness. This could be an outreach worker, shelter staff, public health worker, or social worker, among others. In areas with significant minority language populations, teams should have one member who is fluent in that language, if at all possible. It is also beneficial to coordinate with existing outreach teams or others to be available on the night of the enumeration to provide transport to those encountered, as needed.

Training can be held in-person or virtually and should be done close to the date of the enumeration so that the information is fresh in the mind of the staff or volunteers. Another reason to hold training close to the enumeration date is that staff or volunteers may withdraw or new staff or volunteers may register closer to your date. If possible, provide training at different times of the day to accommodate different work schedules.

Training should include simulations to familiarize volunteers with all forms and procedures. Training materials are available from the Government of Canada, and are available on the [Homelessness](#)

[Learning Hub](#).

The following topics should be covered by the training:

- The purpose of the enumeration: Why it is happening and what the expected benefits for the community and for the respondents are.
- The approach: How to approach someone to answer the screening questions to determine whether they are experiencing homelessness and an explanation of the incentives.
- Logistics and safety: What materials will be provided to enumeration teams; What to wear and bring on the day of the enumeration; Who to contact in case of an emergency; What safety precautions to undertake.

And if using volunteers from the public:

- The nature of homelessness: Who experiences homelessness and why? There is an opportunity to educate volunteers on factors that contribute to homelessness and learn more about those who experience it. This could include specific information on homelessness experienced by specific demographic groups, for example.

Because of the volume of topics that you will want to cover in training, you may wish to provide some background material prior to the session(s). Virtual training materials can be found on the [Homelessness Learning Hub](#).

It is critical that everyone participating in the enumeration receive training, regardless of their experience with people experiencing homelessness and/or previous PiT Counts. In order to create a cohesive picture of homelessness throughout a community, province, and the country, we aim for the highest adherence to the practices outlined in this guide and other updated resources provided by the Government of Canada.

3: The Enumeration

To carry out the enumeration, core screening questions are provided. Individuals may be approached in outdoor locations, or at non-shelter services tailored to people experiencing homelessness such as drop-ins, food/meal programs, health services, or others.

The Script and Informed Consent

Informed consent is defined as the process by which someone administering a survey explains the aims of the survey, and obtains confirmation of the respondents' willingness to participate in it. Enumeration teams should be provided with a consent script to follow for each encounter. The script should be designed to be as brief as possible, while being clear about the purpose of the enumeration. In order to meet basic ethical standards, it is important that the respondent understands how the information they share will be used. It is important that the respondent know that they can decline to participate with no negative repercussions on services they are offered.

The Core Screening Questions

Only individuals who were or will be unsheltered on the night of the count should be included in the unsheltered enumeration. The Core Screening Questions are used to correctly identify people as experiencing homelessness and therefore determine whether the respondent should be included. They need to be broad enough that they include all who are experiencing homelessness during the PiT enumeration, but restrictive enough to exclude people who are not, in fact, experiencing homelessness (e.g., visitors to the city with a permanent residence elsewhere).

The screening questions are below, and can be found in sample enumeration forms on the Homelessness Learning Hub. Those who are encountered in an unsheltered or service location but are planning to spend the night in a shelter should not be included in the enumeration because they will be accounted for via administrative data from the shelter.

See below for the screening questions and an explanation for each.

Core Screening Questions
Screening Question A Have you already spoken to someone tonight [/last night/this morning] with this [identification e.g., button]? ☐ YES ☐ NO
All survey teams should have an identifying item or piece of clothing. Over the course of the count, the same individual may be approached by two teams. This question is intended to reduce double-counting. If they answer "no," proceed with the informed consent script.
Screening Question B Are you willing to answer a brief question about housing and homelessness in our community?

☐ YES

☐ NO

This question follows a brief explanation of the purpose of the enumeration.

Screening Question C

Where are you staying tonight? (/Where did you stay last night?)

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| a. DECLINE TO ANSWER | h. HOMELESS SHELTER (e.g. emergency, family or domestic violence shelter, warming centre, drop-in) |
| b. OWN APARTMENT/HOUSE | i. HOTEL/MOTEL FUNDED BY CITY OR HOMELESS PROGRAM |
| c. SOMEONE ELSE'S PLACE | j. TRANSITIONAL SHELTER/HOUSING |
| d. MOTEL/HOTEL SELF-FUNDED | k. UNSHELTERED IN A PUBLIC SPACE (e.g., street, park, bus shelter, forest or abandoned building) |
| e. HOSPITAL | l. ENCAMPMENT (e.g., group of tents, makeshift shelters or other long-term outdoor settlement) |
| f. TREATMENT CENTRE | m. VEHICLE (e.g., car, van, recreational vehicle [RV], truck, boat) |
| g. JAIL, PRISON, REMAND CENTRE | n. UNSURE: INDICATE PROBABLE LOCATION _____(b.-m.). |

This question includes a list of sheltered and unsheltered locations. It will be the primary tool for determining whether a respondent is considered homeless for the purpose of the unsheltered enumeration. Include responses **k. to m.** in the enumeration for the Core Locations. If the question is being asked *after* the enumeration night, the question would be, "Where did you stay last night?"

If the respondent indicates that they do not know where they are staying that night, interviewers should ask a follow-up question. This will help to determine what kind of location the respondent may spend the night in. It is important to avoid "unsure" responses as much as possible since they cannot be used in the enumeration. For this reason, unsheltered counts are best done at night, when people have identified where they will stay, or early the next day to record an accurate location.

If your community plans to include health and correctional systems in the enumeration (which is optional), you will need to ask a follow-up question to respondents who answer e., f., or g., which is as follows:

Systems Homelessness Screening Question

Screening C1

Do you have access to a permanent residence where you can safely stay as long as you want?

- | | | | |
|--------|-------|---------------|----------------------|
| a. YES | b. NO | c. DON'T KNOW | d. DECLINE TO ANSWER |
|--------|-------|---------------|----------------------|

The purpose of this question is to screen out people that have access to safe, secure housing that they are not staying in on the night of the PIT Count. Examples include people who are hospitalized or in a treatment program, but have a home to return to when they are discharged. Those who answer "no" or "don't know" (b. or c.) to question C1 would be included in the enumeration. Those who "decline to answer" would be included if your community is including observed homelessness and the enumerator believed that the respondent is experiencing homelessness.

It is important to note that there will always be exceptions and that it may still lead to some people being screened out who should be screened in (false negatives) or screened in who should be screened out (false positive). Carefully training staff and volunteers on the people you are trying to reach through the survey will help them discern who should and who should not be included.

Implementing the Enumeration in Shelters and Transitional Housing

Preparation: Shelters should be approached well in advance to give them ample time to understand what you will need from them, and to make the necessary preparations.

To the extent possible, the enumeration of people in shelters and transitional housing facilities should be determined by administrative data. If administrative data on overnight stays is not already being shared with the CE, you have two options to obtain that data. You can develop a data provision agreement with each shelter, or you can provide each shelter data lead with [a data collection form](#) to fill out and return to you the morning following the enumeration. Remember that it is common for the majority of shelters to use a common HMIS whose overnight stay data is accessible by the CE, while a few facilities (e.g. domestic violence shelters) do not use the common HMIS. In these cases, the PiT coordinator will need to also collect data from these facilities manually.

Implementing the Count in Unsheltered Locations

Preparation: The locations to be canvassed will be identified by the coordinator and local partners. Route maps should be prepared for each enumeration team covering unsheltered locations.

The PiT enumeration: The unsheltered number is determined by the number of people who indicate an unsheltered location in response to Screening Question C. Each team should be provided an unsheltered enumeration sheet (see the [Homelessness Learning Hub](#) for example). The enumeration sheet records participants' responses, as well as observed homelessness, if your community is including it.

The number of people observed to be experiencing homelessness is added to the number that provided responses of unsheltered locations to the screening questions.

Consent: Teams must obtain consent prior to asking the screening questions. Consent must be obtained to ensure that the respondent is aware that confidentiality will be maintained.

Screening: All three screening questions must be asked during the unsheltered enumeration.

Ice breakers: Ice breakers are a means to engage the person. Ice breakers are normally a small item (e.g., transit ticket, granola bar) provided upon engaging in the conversation. These can be purchased, or donations may be solicited leading up to the count.

Services: If possible, you should offer to find shelter for the person for that night. You may also wish to use the enumeration as an opportunity to provide information on available services. Some communities offer respondents a list of available services in the community.

4: The Implementation Timeline

Developing a PiT Enumeration Plan and Timeline

The amount of time required to plan the enumeration will depend on the size and geography of the jurisdiction and the collective experience with PiT Counts. A detailed timeline is presented in [Section 2](#). This work can be divided into four phases:

Planning (3+ Months before the PiT Enumeration)

Identify a PiT enumeration coordinator: Ideally, this person will be closely connected with the local homeless-service sector and have a background coordinating community projects. Many communities identify a municipal employee to act as the coordinator. This position can also be contracted out, in which case, ensure that there is adequate knowledge transfer at the end of the project so that you are able to answer questions about the project and support future PiT Counts.

Ensure PiT enumeration partners are on board: Partners will support the implementation of the enumeration and serve to build community support. The PiT enumeration will also benefit from the knowledge and experience of partners. Work on the enumeration should draw on the expertise of the local Reaching Home CE and CAB, as well as the Indigenous Homelessness CE and CAB, where applicable. The municipality, police and other emergency responders, as well as other stakeholders closely involved in supporting people experiencing homelessness can also be partners in the enumeration. Working with the local HIFIS Lead, or coordinated data lead, helps to facilitate access to shelter data for the sheltered enumeration. People with lived experience of homelessness should also be consulted.

Build or update Community's Systems Map: The community Systems Map can be used as the framework for collecting data for the sheltered enumeration. If a community Systems Map has not yet been developed, gathering information on programs that provide services to people experiencing homelessness can be used to meet both requirements. If the community has already developed a Systems Map, the fall PiT count is an opportunity to check that all information is still up-to-date and that the map is comprehensive.

Reach out to the community: Develop a communication strategy in order to share information about the upcoming enumeration. For communities working with volunteers to carry out the enumeration, building early community awareness of the PiT Count will be key to recruiting volunteers. Local businesses may be interested in supporting the PiT Count through funding or donations (e.g., items for participants, food for volunteers, etc.).

Preparation (1 – 3 Months before the PiT Enumeration)

Determine the unsheltered PiT enumeration method: Based on the size, geography, and resources of the community, different approaches can be taken to defining the search areas in the community for the unsheltered component of the PiT Count. The approaches are described in [Section 3](#).

Compile a comprehensive list of shelter services in your community: A PiT Count enumeration has to include individuals experiencing homelessness in all types of shelters. The CE likely has existing relationships with most shelter providers, but there may be some with whom they do not. These may be temporary, informal, weather dependent, or new shelters which do not receive funding via the CE. In addition to collecting data on the number of individuals who spent the night of the count in each shelter, you will need to collect information on the total number of beds, genders and populations served, address (where possible) and contact information, and the type of service each provides as part of your PiT enumeration. This exercise can also be leveraged to populate or update the community Systems Map, which includes the same information. Once a Systems Map has been developed or updated in the months prior to the count, it can be used to collect and store enumeration data for sheltered locations on the night of the count.

Recruit sector staff or volunteers: Early and repeated communication is important for recruiting and retaining staff from partner organizations and public volunteers. If utilizing volunteers, local leaders and community groups may be interested in participating (e.g., local politicians, student groups, religious communities, Business Improvement Associations, unions, etc.).

Prepare a plan for the day of the PiT Count enumeration: Identify a central headquarters for coordinating the enumeration. Larger communities may want area hubs: neighbourhood satellite locations where enumerators meet before and after they cover their outdoor routes. Determine the composition of your teams: you may want to ensure each team has individuals with certain skills, such as experience working in encampments, proficiency in a second language, or knowledge of first aid. Identify what resources you will need (e.g., gear for teams, identification items, incentives for participation).

Implementation (Less than 1 Month before the PiT Enumeration)

Train staff or volunteers: Each enumerator must receive applicable training on how to ask the screening questions, how to fill out enumeration sheets, and how to request assistance, if required. Keep in mind that even experienced staff benefit from a brief training on how to fill out the enumeration sheets properly. This will help to achieve consistent administration techniques across the country. Training should occur close to the day of the enumeration to reduce the likelihood that the staff or volunteers who attend the training will forget important content shared, be absent for the count, or participate in the count without receiving the required training. See [Section 3](#) for more information on enumerator training.

Final preparation: Purchase supplies and prepare maps and kits for teams. Deliver forms and supplies to area hubs, if applicable. Those identified through the unsheltered portion of the PiT enumeration may be in need of emergency services or shelter. An outreach team (or teams) should be on call to quickly address these needs on the day of the PiT enumeration. Make sure your list of shelter facilities is complete to ensure the completeness of your sheltered count.

Day of the PiT Enumeration

The day of the enumeration will look different depending on the timing of the unsheltered portions of the count.

For resources relating to the day of the PiT Count, including an overview of the PiT Count from the perspective of the staff or volunteer, and considerations for the set-up of your headquarters, please

see the [Homelessness Learning Hub](#).

Post-Count

Enter enumeration data: Data should be tabulated and submitted to the Government of Canada as soon after the PiT Count as possible, and no later than two months after the completion of the enumeration. Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada will provide a template that is harmonized with the Systems Map template to complete this step. It will require the provision of the number of people experiencing homelessness in each of the following delineated places:

- encampments
- other unsheltered areas
- emergency shelters
- domestic violence shelters
- transitional housing programs
- hotels/motels
- systems (*optional*)

Update the community Systems Map: The Systems Map includes information on service providers that interact with people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. The Government of Canada has provided a [template](#) to complete this step.

Share with the community: To maintain community engagement and support for future PiT Counts, a communication strategy is essential. Be prepared for media attention concerning the PiT enumeration. A specific strategy to share results with people experiencing homelessness is strongly encouraged. This may increase willingness to engage in future PiT Counts.

Prepare for the next PiT Count: The local PiT Count partners should discuss lessons learned and what could be improved for the next PiT Count (e.g., logistics, search areas). A survey or group debrief of staff and/or volunteers from the PiT Count is encouraged in order to collect a range of perspectives.

5: After the PiT Enumeration

After the enumeration day, you will need to compile data from your various sources: administrative shelter data, shelter data from administrators of facilities that don't use your local HMIS, and enumeration sheets from teams that covered unsheltered areas. You will also need to initiate a communication strategy for sharing the findings. The work with local partners will continue after the day of the PiT enumeration as you review what went well and what can be improved in future PiT Counts.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The PiT Core Enumeration

The core enumeration includes the total number of people experiencing visible homelessness (i.e., who stayed in shelters, domestic violence shelters, encampments and other unsheltered locations on the night of the PiT Count) as well as those who are provisionally accommodated in a transitional housing program. Because this number is based only on the Core Locations, it is a number that can be compared across the years and can be rolled up across communities. It is not a perfect number but it represents the minimum number of people who were homeless on the night of the count.

Visible Homelessness is calculated as follows:

The number of people in **shelters** (including extreme weather shelters, and those staying in a hotel/motel facilities provided in lieu of shelters).

+

The number of people in **Domestic Violence shelters**

+

The number of people identified as experiencing homelessness in **unsheltered locations** outside of encampments (e.g., who gave an unsheltered location when answering the screening question[s] + those who were observed homeless, where applicable).

+

The number of people identified as experiencing homelessness in **encampments** (e.g., those encountered in an encampment who gave an unsheltered location when answering the screening question[s] + those who were observed homeless in encampments, where applicable).

The number of people who are **Provisionally Accommodated** is calculated as follows:

The number of people in **transitional housing programs**

Submitting Results to Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada

Communities participating in the coordinated PiT Count must submit their results to Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada using the template provided within two months of the

enumeration date. Reporting will include questions about your experience of planning and carrying out the PiT enumeration, and information on each service provider that accommodates people overnight, including: number of individuals enumerated in each location mentioned previously, and number of beds in each of the locations on the night of the count.

Your community's data will contribute to a cross-Canada picture of homelessness. It will deepen our understanding of the population affected by homelessness, and the supports that may be needed to help them find secure housing. You can find reports from earlier PiT Counts on the [Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada - Data analysis, reports and publications](#) webpage.

While results from individual communities will not be featured in the national report from Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, we will request your permission to share community-level data on a results page hosted on the Homelessness Learning Hub. The results page will offer a central location for each community to share their PiT Count enumeration and link to their local report. Sharing PiT Count data and highlighting local reports will increase knowledge of homelessness across Canada, help those working in the sector to better understand the state of homelessness in communities similar to theirs, and inform the development of policies and programs. This page will increase the awareness of PiT Count results and the availability of the data for policy makers, students, researchers, and the Canadian public.

Communicating the Results

Once the enumeration is complete, interest may be high in the community and among project partners in particular, to see the results. Links to the community PiT Count reports can be found on the Homeless Hub community profiles page:

https://homelesshub.ca/community_profile/calgary/

Communicating With the General Community

The results should be released as soon as possible after the enumeration. The community, after having invested time and money in the enumeration, will be eagerly anticipating the results. Please inform HICC of the release and share your report.

Be prepared for media attention around the release of the results. Communicating early helps keep the community engaged and interested in supporting solutions. This can be done through a [media release or announcement](#), website update, and/or social media release. You can also consider hosting an open community meeting to talk about the results.

Communicating with People who are Experiencing Homelessness

Many people experiencing homelessness will have taken the time to answer the screening questions. While they may have received a small remuneration for their time, it is important to acknowledge their contribution and to convey how PiT Counts will help them and others experiencing homelessness. Unfortunately, some may still be experiencing homelessness during future counts. The more they see the value of PiT Counts, the more likely they will be to participate again. You may wish to work with shelters and other front-line services to determine the best communication strategy.

Planning for the Next PiT Count

The local coordinator and project partners should meet after the enumeration to debrief what went well and identify areas for improvement in future counts. Insights from staff and volunteers, in particular, will provide information on how the enumeration worked on the ground: Did the locations or the sampling approach miss particular populations? Did people experiencing homelessness participate, or did they avoid the teams? The responses to these and other questions will help you to refine your implementation for future PiT Counts.

In some large communities, planning for the next PiT Count begins as soon as the last one has ended. Partners may wish to meet as milestones are reached (e.g., preliminary report released, final analyses done, post-PiT Count review completed, etc.). If possible, keep the project partners engaged between PiT Counts.

The next full PiT count, where the Survey on Homelessness will be administered, will take place in 2027. PiT enumerations will be held each fall between administrations of the survey in order to more quickly identify shifts in the population of those experiencing homelessness.

For more information

Additional information and resources related to Point-in-Time Counts in Canada can be found on the Homelessness Learning Hub: <https://homelessnesslearninghub.ca/point-in-time-counts/>.